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FOUR centuries back, as Anthony Wood recorded, there were 28 plagues in Oxford. The richer colleges acquired or built plague houses in country locations like Woodstock, Whitney and Garsington to which their fellows could escape for isolation and safety. But some fellows (and their students) chose to see it out in Oxford, trusting—as they might—in the judgement of the great designer above.

Today, under similar circumstances, we trust in the judgement of a small group of University officers who, admirably, have resolutely stayed very much in place throughout the time of Covid-19, but have been forced by the situation this term to isolate many of our students in their homes. Colleges have retained their autonomy and last term were absolutely crucial in safe-guarding and managing student risks. To some extent, alongside the innumerable small acts of kindness, they responded in their own different ways; some deciding to move hall into a tent in the middle of the front quad lawn, others drafting in a college cat to boost community spirit. Academics have come to rely increasingly on the companionship,

History

gossip and mutual support of colleagues in college now that the usual wider University meetings are so restricted. But the pandemic has, much less obviously, brought about an inevitable fundamental restructuring of the University as a whole, involving a centralisation of policy-making, and some new forms of conformity across colleges.

Now, since Covid arrived, Congregation no longer serves as a practical forum for the expression of our democratic self-governance, UCU strikes are no longer realistic options, and our involvement in University policies and affairs is reduced to being dependent on blogs and Zoom Q&As in the name of the University officers. Everything is online (including the *Gazette* and *Oxford Magazine*) and much must increasingly be left unread amongst the welter of briefly scanned or deleted emails and other streams (and we have yet to find out the disruptive and burdensome effects of the incoming Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) system). Major policy decisions are still being made, such as the funding of Reuben College or the planning of the £192m “Centre for Life and Mind Sciences”: the

Oxford Magazine publication arrangements

We are unable to publish the *Oxford Magazine* in print for the foreseeable future, as a result of COVID19-related working restrictions. Arrangements for archival copies will be made at a later date.

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many ambitious effects of the Strategic Plan continue to unfold. But our normal checks and balances are suspended and one has to wonder—as usual it is virtually impossible to find out—whether Council (let alone its various committees) is adequately informed and consulted in advance about the newly emerging policies anymore.

In this context what is the point of *Oxford Magazine*? It's a question that has frequently been asked over the decades—often from a position that supposes “none”—but it's quite easily answered. It serves as an internal communication channel – depending particularly on your position in the admin/academic divide, either welcome or suspect—open to all staff for the free expression of opinion in general and especially on how the supposedly democratically self-governing University is operating. Granted that there is always room for improvement in any organization, the critics naturally predominate. The establishment routinely sees little need to respond in kind. But the *Magazine* is, equally impor-

tantly, something else. It is a historical record—starting from 1883 with one or two breaks—of our life and times from the inside, written by colleagues who care and who are sufficiently concerned to observe and think about the University's health. At any given moment it may not be obvious, but this accumulating archive is magnificent evidence of the permanent value of this occasional, quirky chronicle of change in the University.

Oxford Magazine is unique and, to our knowledge, not replicated in any other world university. At its best it has played a major and direct—and always democratic—role in determining policy at some of the most important points in our history. But, in the longer term and more significantly, it is a resource from which we can reconstruct the broader trends driving our venerable institution. The lessons from history are never a matter of simple repetition but the factors that propel change are long-term and can only be revealed if the historical record is preserved.

B.B, T.J.H

Reflections on a COVID Term

BEN BOLLIG

I spent the first two terms of 2020 on research leave, so missed the herculean effort to reinvent teaching and examining online in Trinity term. I have nothing but admiration for colleagues who—almost miraculously, it seemed—over a couple of weeks in the spring transformed a centuries-old system into one that could be delivered and assessed remotely. Instead, my challenge had been to finish various research projects while taking part-responsibility for home/virtual-schooling two children.

In the depths of lockdown, when I'd shifted two suitcases of books and folders from my office to the back room at home, packed up my thermos and *maté*, and hurriedly installed the VPN on my laptop, it was hard to imagine myself in front of a class or tutorial at any stage in the future. The early days of the pandemic were marked by a fear (occasionally panic) born of uncertainty, as evinced in the recently published SAGE minutes.

In October, though, I did find myself back in class, giving a face-to-face induction talk to the mod-langs Freshers at Catz—all masked, all spread out in the JCR theatre, and all, myself included, struck by the unreality of it all, alongside the very real concern that the massive shift put in by support and domestic staff, administrators and lecturers, to get the show up and running, would be in vain when we were all sent back home again in second or third week.

We weren't, however, sent home in second or, for that matter, any week. In spite of a national lockdown, and spikes and outbreaks in individual colleges, something like a term of teaching took place. With suitable “mitigations”—one of those strange new words we've had to learn in the last few months, like “R-number” and “furlough”—I managed to teach most of my tutorials in person. Language classes were slightly more difficult, but smaller groups (and a consequently fuller timetable) meant that I could also do these in person. I agreed with students that a

decent in-pandemic student satisfaction test was, “Is this better than nothing?” I'd like to think that this test was comfortably met.

There was much discussion about the wisdom and safety of teaching in person. For colleagues shielding or shielding others, I could understand their reluctance to return. My own reasoning was that, with two children in school and at an age and state of health that gave me no additional cause for concern, if I was going to catch COVID then it would just as likely be at home than at work, and it wasn't something to worry unduly about. For me a larger health concern was isolation—my own and that of my students. As it was, I didn't catch COVID during Michaelmas term—there have been, so far, no cases of classroom transmission in the UK, and in my own college almost no cases among staff.

There were also plenty of “virtual” or “online synchronous” classes, mainly due to students having to self-isolate or be at/return home. The fully-virtual classes worked better than the hybrid (some students in the room, some not), not least because I could never find a way of avoiding feedback and noise. Students seemed happy to put up with my technically insufficiencies for the reality of being in a room with other people.

As good as online activities can be, teaching virtually lacks something that teaching face-to-face has. It's hard to define, perhaps to do with the lack of non-verbal cues, the sound delay, or the fact that you can't pass around and pore over materials together on screen (or if you can, I haven't yet discovered how). By analogy, if Zoom (or your platform of choice) is so great, why all the fuss about getting together at Christmas?

So I had mixed feelings about the UCU's demand for all teaching to go online, or some of my colleagues' more pessimistic predictions. But even before COVID, working in a University has been making people sick—with

stress, with depression, and other ailments, mental and physical and a combination of the both – and the causes of this (overwork, managerialism, casualization, discrimination) need to be addressed urgently. COVID has only made these inequalities and their effects more apparent.

I felt very sorry for students shut in their accommodation, and although I know colleges have tried hard to keep them connected and healthy, students forced to spend two weeks alone, often in a small room, with no access to outside space or proper fresh air, must have had a miserable time. Counsellors, Junior Deans, and tutors checking in on their tutees, all provide a lifeline.

The consequence of all this was a ridiculous level of busyness. Everything seems to take longer, and there is more of everything. Administrative and teaching-related admin demands have been on an upward curve for years now. COVID-19 should be a trigger for thinking about what is mission-critical, what can be overlooked, and what actually gets in the way of teaching and research. Who didn't sigh with relief when the OxCort-replacement tutorial reporting programme was postponed until who-knows-when? At the same time, the collective howls of frustration when the new MFA SSO system simultaneously locked dozens of academics out of their computers all around town gave an object lesson in how not to plan, time and manage technical change.

Admissions – normally dealt with either side of a weekend – stretched over a fortnight, or even longer. Virtual interviews worked better than I'd feared – there are even some advantages, as secondary distractions like body language are cut out. But the variation in provision of IT facilities and teaching spaces between different types of school was painfully visible even via webcam. As was the very uneven coverage of fast broadband around the country, especially in rural areas.

There's been some tremendous inventiveness on display, too – from tutors conducting classes outdoors, to hastily constructed marquees and tents to allow safe social interaction (technically) outdoors, to new ways of combining real and online teaching. But students have clearly missed out on a lot of what makes Oxford a fun and memorable place to study – having free run of its libraries, socialising in JCR bars, mixing informally with tutors at college dinners, and the many excuses for dressing up in funny clothes.

My perception is that first years have had it hardest: the best year of their life trapped in a plague. The social interaction that facilitates adaption to university life hasn't really happened, on top of a miserable summer and chaotic school exams. I met my own partner in a bar during freshers' week at uni, some 25 years ago, having spent a memorable summer working in Dublin, after doing rather better in my A-levels than I'd expected: pity the 2020 version of myself.

The biggest problems around discipline and mental health – often inextricably linked – seem to have been with first years. It's difficult for them to get a sense of how the University works, and how a college community functions, in such strange circumstances, hard to unpick their frustration at the hand they've been dealt from resistance to norms and rules necessary to keep us all safe. And all because of a disease that most of them can catch without serious ill-effects, a real-life version of *Brass Eye's* blackly comic "symptomless coma" sketch.

Some students clearly did struggle to deal with the

restrictions, and college staff – lodge porters, decanal teams and scouts – found themselves thrown into an arm wrestle over disciplinary matters. Porters are the public face of a college, but also a line of containment between internal discipline and external intervention (by Public Health England, or the Police). The Conference of Colleges played an important advisory role and we avoided the embarrassing and dangerous scenes of massive illegal gatherings and parties seen at other institutions. Nor was there any "naming-and-shaming" of students, with colleges mostly managing to keep matters in house.

I've spoken to quite a few finalists and graduates – particularly those in their second years or beyond – who've said that this last term or couple of terms have been their best ever at Oxford. At first I thought this was a joke about how miserable studying here is, but it was meant with genuine affection. Lockdowns and other restrictions have forced a clear-eyed focus on their studies, with no distractions, and a collective sense of the need to knuckle down and get on with it. I've been greatly impressed by the stoicism and resolve of many of my students. I've also noticed that for those second years who've adapted to the situation – and the second year of a modern languages degree is often when students go off the boil, exams behind or far off, the joys of a year abroad too close on the horizon – have produced some of the best work that I've seen from undergraduates. There exists a sweet spot between the intellectual range that FHS permits and the forcible absence of other interesting things to do.

Prompted by colleagues, there were two things I did that made a huge difference to my Michaelmas: the first was scanning and saving to "the cloud" all the various handwritten notes that I've been using as teaching cribs over the years. This was my Plan B, in case college was fully shut down.

The second was recording lectures to Canvas before term started. I'm not a fan of recorded lectures – I felt mine lacked spark and spontaneity in comparison to live delivery, while I became aware of my various tics, imperceptible in person, but amplified in the glare of the webcam. Canvas is counter-intuitive and ill-suited to Oxford's model of teaching. But once my lectures were up online it was one less thing to worry about. Thursday mornings, usually spent cycling to the Taylor or Wellington Square, panicking about whether the handouts are in my bag or not, were a welcome moment to catch up on marking and emails.

Hilary term comes with a lot of uncertainty: how will the vaccine roll-out work? What of the new strain of the virus? When will students return for face-to-face teaching? As an institution, the University has so far earned a lot of credit: for its work on a vaccine; for setting up a mass-testing system; for running COVID-safe elite education; and for getting students safely out of town again. But the greater effort required from all – for no discernible extra reward, other than grateful missives from the V-C – is not sustainable. And there are worrying trends that have continued or worsened during the crisis: the centralisation of power; the concentration of decision-making in an ever-smaller number of hands; the gutting of Congregation. Even the decision to grant welcome extra holiday to staff failed to reflect life on the ground and created practical headaches for those involved in admissions and examinations.

Lessons from a Grudging Concession

PETER OPPENHEIMER

FEW readers of *Oxford Magazine*, one imagines, will have been among the unnamed recipients (“Dear Sir or Madam”—surely these days it should be “Madam or Sir”??) of a short letter dispatched in the middle of 8th week, Michaelmas Term 2020, with the following announcement:

“Oxford University has decided that, in view of future trading prospects, Oxford Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the University, should cease operations. The University very much regrets this decision, and in particular the impact of redundancy on the company’s 15 members of staff. The company’s responsibilities for the Oxford brand and logo will be taken on by the University itself. All other company activities will be discontinued. The company’s shop in Oxford city centre, which has not opened since March, and its online retail site...will now close permanently....”

The circumstance is ironical and profoundly indicative. The notion that the Oxford University “brand and logo” needed defending or promoting through a “wholly-owned subsidiary” selling licenses and running a tatty souvenir shop in the city centre was always an insult to the intelligence, an embarrassing aberration to be reversed at the earliest opportunity. Yet so transfixed has been “The University’s” central administration and “senior management” with its own image-making, and with assorted commercialized “spin-offs”, that it allowed the aberration to stand for well over a decade—and would evidently have continued to do so, had not COVID-19 intervened.

Nor was the prolonged inaction mere carelessness or oversight. The University hierarchs had ostentatiously rebuffed private and public criticism from senior academics including members of Council. One of them was Christopher Lewis—who on two distinct occasions felt driven to voice his disquiet in these pages. Lewis’s message was that any attempt by the administration to assimilate the University’s *modus operandi* to that of a business enterprise was muddle-headed, wasteful and, if extrapolated, ultimately a latent threat to Oxford’s existential future.

“[T]he very heterogeneity which seems hydra-headed to an ap-paratchik is the glory of Oxford and explains why it is so attractive, inventive, resilient and enduring. Were it to be a corporation with all the power and money at a ‘centre’, then it would probably have been destroyed long ago by a Vice-Chancellor with bright ideas.”

(“The University of Oxford (Limited)”, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 328, 2nd Week, Michaelmas Term 2012.) So much for ‘One Oxford’. Not to mention diversity, albeit institutional rather than racial.

Lewis’s reversion to the topic a few years later was in more light-hearted vein, focussing mostly on the absurdity of the matter (“On Kissing”, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 367, Noughth Week, Hilary Term 2016)—but also pointing out that reasonable aims such as “preventing language schools and the like from passing themselves off as part of

the University” were taken care of world-wide by Oxford University Press.

The 15 employees made redundant by the closure were unlucky in that they happened to occupy a clearly circumscribed bunch of posts the futility of whose existence could no longer be denied. Most of the overmanning in central officialdom is not as starkly obvious. The borderline between necessary functions and gratuitous intervention is often blurred. Budget constraints are “light-touch”. Activity can be shared out among excessive staff numbers, and with no clear expectation that it should somehow pay for itself.

Within that overmanning the largest single element (in absolute, not in proportionate, terms) belongs to IT Services. This merits attention for at least two reasons. First, its growth has been marked by senior management subterfuge (something of a precedent for the creation of Parks/Reuben College in 2018-19). The present organisation of IT Services dates from 2012. More precisely, from the middle of the long vacation of 2012, when Wellington Square pounced at forty-eight hours’ notice upon two formerly autonomous computing units (OU Computing Services and the ICT Support Team), and merged them with its own Business Services and Projects (BSP) section. [See the writer’s “Contrasting Announcements”, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 328, 2nd Week, Michaelmas Term 2012.]

The declared motive was “to improve services for users”—who, however, had not been consulted. Nor was there any mention that a merger of this kind ought to yield economies, including staff economies, and indeed was unlikely to be warranted unless it did so. The newly merged IT Services section began with a staff of 289. Not quite five years later, the total in Hilary Term 2017 came to 435. And services to academic staff? They, intriguingly, were reduced. The erstwhile computer service help-desk was replaced by an e-mail address, from which applicants were typically told to direct inquiries to their faculty or college computing officers or otherwise to commercial firms of their choice. The explanation appears to be that Wellington Square has, in this particular domain and for the time being, suspended its campaign to suppress departmental and college autonomy.

It has, however, succeeded—and this is the second aspect meriting attention—in imposing itself not merely upon established academics but upon the student body in ways which are widely seen as unconstructive, not to say oppressive. The last issue of *Oxford Magazine* in 2020 (No. 426, Eighth Week, Michaelmas Term) contained an article, “Technical Reasons”, by Finn Jarvis, an undergraduate reading Lit. Hum. at Trinity College, expressing discomfort at the onward march both of IT and of other “technical systems—...administrative, financial, legal” in the academic sphere. The tripwire for Jarvis’s remarks was the introduction of the new Single-Sign-On (SSO) system, involving Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), into the University’s IT network. But in reflecting on that issue he hits a much broader nail firmly on the head:

“technical systems...tend to provide a cover for the appropriation of institutional power by those who would not otherwise be entitled to hold it. Administrative and support departments tend to have much more direct and obvious management hierarchies than the structures many collegiate academics have traditionally enjoyed.....Perhaps this transfer of power would be tolerable if the swollen ‘support’ staff that it necessitates had led to a superb technical and administrative assistance that unburdened academic staff....Certainly there are non-academic functions that are essential to the University’s existence and activity, and the good will and hard work of the relevant staff are not in question. Nonetheless, when the carefully designed application of vast resources leaves us inconvenienced and obstructed, it is clear that the arrangement is structurally not in the interests of academic life.”

The dysfunctional nature of Oxford’s governance at the present time is beyond dispute. What is striking and – like Oxford Ltd. – offensive to the intelligence, is that senior management, and central administration more broadly, retain an overwhelming vested interest, both financial and political, in this very dysfunctionality and its preservation. The recurring pattern is to divert attention, obfuscate diagnosis and keep governance structures unchanged.

Diversions are of varying type and scope. There is first the open Q and A session, where participants are invited to put questions on a specified topic to University officers – the Vice-Chancellor, one or more Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar. Then there are surveys of opinion, respondents being asked for numerical and/or verbal assessments of different parts of the administration with which they have had contact, possibly adding suggestions for modification. Most of the audience or respondents under both these categories are, for many obvious reasons, likely themselves to be administrative staff.

Third, and more narrowly specified, is the penitential self-flagellation demanded of Council, mainly through triennial “Self-Reviews of its own Effectiveness”, and to a lesser extent in occasional “Away-days”. The basic reason for Council’s ineffectiveness is carefully side-stepped, namely, that it is controlled by senior management and the administration, for whom it acts as a rubber stamp. Fourth and last in our little catalogue is the Focus programme. This was launched three years ago through the Vice-Chancellor’s Oration of October 2017, with twin objectives. One was to tranquilise the academic community by “recasting and simplifying service delivery”. A few details, on the automation of expense claims, were spelled out in *Oxford Magazine*, No. 397, Fifth Week, Trinity Term 2018 by Ewan Mckendrick and Anne Trefethen. The other stated objective was “to help us with staff retention by ensuring that there is a path to career advancement for all our staff.” In plain language, central administrative bureaucrats must have opportunities for promotion. This is getting uncomfortably close to what alarmed Christopher Lewis ten years ago. The implications both for cost and for what Finn Jarvis rightly calls “appropriation of institutional power” scarcely bear contemplating. And the danger here is that COVID-19, far from killing off the nightmare, may actually facilitate its onset.

To conclude. Oxford Ltd. over the span of its existence inflicted upon the University a cumulative financial loss of, apparently, some £300K. Absolute peanuts compared to the amount unjustifiably spent by central management on itself and its administrative army in *every single year*. And the latter figure can safely be doubled when one allows for the misallocation of capital funds to buildings rather than endowment, in the absence of any coherent plan for the overall size and structure of the University.

The editors invite and welcome contributions from all our readers.
The content of *Oxford Magazine* relies largely on what arrives spontaneously on the editors’ desk and is usually published as received.

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And this time is different?

DAVID PALFREYMAN

UNIVERSITIES in terms of a (the?) core activity of delivering their teaching function operate essentially as if it is still c1400—lots of lectures and the convenient long vacation academic year, and hence the key variables affecting productivity, remain unchanged for over 500 years! Now and again there is talk of impending radical change—just a few years back, for instance, from Christiansen & Eyring (2011)¹ and Barber (2013).² And now we have Galloway (2020).³

Yet somehow that change never actually happens and the medieval craft-industry model sails serenely on in the context of mass C21 HE and despite cogent analysis of its unsustainable format and its unfitness for C21 purpose—Martin (2011),⁴ Caplan (2018),⁵ Vedder (2019),⁶ Koch & Cebula (2020).⁷ The HE Industry is adept at battling away such critiques, indeed at simply ignoring them and at refusing point-blank even to acknowledge them let alone engage with them.

Why indeed would the Industry bother to change itself other than perhaps if it could see a need to make its own defensive anticipatory changes or otherwise face external imposed radical change? And while such an external threat hovers it never seems actually to have bite, no matter how much talked about by politicians and pundits—the political will to take on the universities dissipates when faced with the mystery and complexity of the Black Box that is the university economic model and when confronted with the voters' seemingly remorseless demand for evermore HE (Mandler, 2020).⁸

It would require an unusually determined Treasury absolutely to insist on HE offering up cost-savings for the taxpayer or politicians of great stamina to demand that HE show greater accountability to its student-customers. The Treasury gives up and moves onto easier savings targets such as transport; the politicians give up and tackle easier reform targets such as the NHS and policing. But is this time different?—will the disruption to university finances—and indeed to Government finances—from the Covid Crisis really force change? (See Palfreyman & Temple, 2017; Palfreyman & Tapper, 2014; Farrington & Palfreyman, 2021).^{9,10,11}

Galloway (2020) certainly thinks that This Time Is Different, that Christensen's 'disruptive innovation' is (at least) imminent, and that Barber's (delayed) 'avalanche' is about to gather pace and sweep into the Groves of Academe, knocking over the Ivory Tower... The Galloway thesis is that the Covid Crisis will accelerate underlying trends towards change in many areas of social and economic activity, including HE (Chapter 4): HE being one of few industries that 'sit closer to the ground zero of Covid acceleration' and as anyway already 'ripe for disruption' even pre-Covid given its rampant cost-inflation, its pathetic record of innovation in teaching delivery, its cartel behaviour, its facing pressure from distance-learning, its poor 'value proposition', its conservatism and inertia.

Thus, asserts Galloway, the HE 'value proposition' of $C+E+Ex=T$ is under threat—where C is the credential gained, E is the actual education/learning, Ex is 'the stu-

dent experience' of the Uni as Country Club, and T is the fee paid. Only 'schools that offer an exceptional credential' can be complacent (Reader—that is us at Oxford, and perhaps even Cambridge as well as Harvard, Stanford, Yale, et al). So, 'we will see a culling among universities' and 'a profound change in the way higher education is delivered' based on 'distance tech'—among existing HE institutions the winners will be the ones able to grasp opportunity and scale, and do so in the face of or indeed in collaboration with wealthy and fierce new entrants to the HE Industry in the form of Big Tech. And eventually, Galloway speculates, we get MIT/Google, Bocconi/Apple, Carnegie Mellon/Amazon, UCLA/Netflix, University of Washington/Microsoft... Where does that leave Oxford & Cambridge? And, BTW, he calls for the elite private US Us to be taxed to support public/state Us—including the punitive taxation of Harvard's \$40b Endowment. And he invites Apple to set up its own U focussed on the arts; while GoogleU is to be all 'comp sc' and AmazonUni is about 'operations'—fanciful?

And finally, another powerful critique of the HE Industry that will, of course, be studiously ignored by those within it who will fervently hope that yet another exposure of the cherished myths of what is in reality a deeply dysfunctional academe does not come to the attention of pesky politicians with nothing better to do than ask awkward questions about just what goes on inside the HE Black Box: Brennan & Magness (2019).¹² Here the tone is very different from critics such as Martin and Vedder—as economists they see the dysfunctionality of HE as a result of baked-in problems such as information asymmetry, agency conflicts, poorly constructed incentives, rent-seeking behaviour. Brennan & Magness detect the key problem of perverse incentives but are rather more scathing about academics and institutions acting immorally and unethically in following them rather than just out of simple economic rationality, and at times they almost touch on the polemical—they see corruption, greed, and fraudulent mis-selling in the governance and management of universities: 'We think higher education suffers from serious moral flaws...everyone engages in self-righteous moral grandstanding to disguise their selfish cronyism...'.¹³

What should be the chapter of most concern to academe—assuming anybody in the Ivory Tower ever reads B&M (even when their book has the imprimatur of an elite academic press §—Note 12)—is the one entitled: 'Why most academic advertising is immoral bullshit'. They assert that universities engage in 'negligent advertising' and in 'unethical marketing' ('They are not exactly lying, but selling snake oil.')—and especially when hyping 'The Wonder of the Liberal Arts'. They offer an amusing vignette comparing HE with Big Pharma—asking what would happen if Pfizer tried to get away with marketing 'Collegra' as an expensive new miracle drug but without the usual evidence of careful clinical trials: Pfizer would be in trouble, but not so Poppleton U or the U of Barsetshire ('College marketeers are slimy, but it's a different

kind of slime from the stereotypical used car salesperson... college marketers are more like true believer psychics, TV evangelists, or cult leaders' in that they believe in what they do but like these counterparts they lack credible evidence to support their faith. The solution?—regulate HE marketing as for drug companies (in fact the UK's Advertising Standards Authority has recently taken to task half a dozen of them for their dodgy claims); launch a class-action lawsuit against colleges 'for failing to deliver on their promises' (very hard as the 100+ such USA lawsuits re alleged deficiencies in teaching delivery because of the Covid disruption have been finding out—and not least since there is rarely a comprehensive and clear contract between U and the student); and engender 'competition from alternative forms of education that better deliver the goods' (back to the accreditation cartel entry barrier faced by new players).

Brennan & Magness next romp through an exploration of, *inter alia*: 'inconsistent, incompatible, and incommensurate meanings' that plague the grading of student academic performance' ('voodoo calculations'); the 'moral grandstanding' way in which HE Industry lobbies at the trough of public funding for the 'noble' cause of 'higher' education as a public good; 'Why universities produce too many PhDs' and the 'origins of the humanities PhD glut' (back to the 'perverse incentives' encouraging selfish rent-seeking behaviour); and why HE has only itself to blame for its woes rather than lamenting as supposed sordid neoliberal corporatisation creeps into the once allegedly pure Ivory Tower; and the need for HE to start a serious effort of 'Answering Taxpayers' and demonstrating why universities should remain worthy 'of the public's trust'. And they emphatically conclude that 'Universities are a moral mess'. (Martin and Vedder are emeritus, although Vedder wrote earlier challenges to the HE model while a career academic; Brennan & Magness are similarly rare and brave beasts as insiders shouting about the emperor's lack of ethical clothing—one hopes they both have the protection of academic tenure!).

A prediction?—is it radical even revolutionary disruptive change ahead, an avalanche sweeping across the HE landscape accelerated by the Covid Crisis; or, post-Covid, is it back to the complacent and conservative inertia of being a moribund monopoly of credentialisation, gobbling up the taxpayer's \$s and the student's £s while safely beyond any rigorous scrutiny and while fending off any robust accountability? My money is on the latter, which is why university managers can readily ignore all the books cited in this article (except, of course, Mandler with his encouraging thesis that universal HE is the inevitable future). They can safely adopt a Panglossian view and pretend the critiques simply do not exist—while lobbying away at the public funding trough. And, if university leaders ever digest anything written about HE, then better for them to bother only with Pollyanna texts—which far outnumber the few critical tomes listed here, by about 20 to 1; and are almost invariably emanating from humanities and sociology academics deeply ensconced in the groves of academe and lamenting modern mass HE as bedevilled by corporatism, commodification, and consumerism, by marketisation, managerialism, and malevolent neoliberal forces.

So, the prediction (for what little it is worth) is that in the HE world it will be 1400 for the foreseeable future.

(Mental Note—revisit in 2030 and test whether prediction correct...)

¹ C.M. Christensen & H.J. Eyring, 2011, *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out* (Jossey-Bass). They declare: 'universities are at a critical crossroads...[they] must become much more affordable, particularly by embracing online learning technology... a disruptive technology, online learning, is at work in higher education...'

² M. Barber et al, 2013, *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead* (IPPR). The avalanche means 'deep, radical, and urgent transformation' as 'the traditional university is being unbundled' within a changing market-place where 'the new student consumer is king' and where governments 'will need to think their regulatory regimes' so that universities are obliged 'to find ways to reduce cost while increasing quality'—and thus 'as an avalanche reshapes the mountain, so the changes ahead will fundamentally alter the landscape for universities'.

³ S. Galloway, 2020, *Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity—Winners & Losers in a World Turned Upside Down* (Bantam Press).

⁴ R.E. Martin, 2011, *The College Cost Disease: Higher Cost and Lower Quality* (Edward Elgar). He talks of 'extravagant increases in cost', of the neglect of teaching while chasing 'an expansion in the output of research of dubious value', of 'stagnant' innovation, of 'egregious governance failure' and of 'serious agency abuse', of producer-capture and the exploitation of universities' monopoly over credentialisation. On the huge cross-subsidy from the mal-allocation of tuition fee income towards the propping up of otherwise inadequately funded research see C. Schwartz, 2016, *'Disaggregating the Costs of Academic Missions at the University of California'* (<http://ocf.berkeley.edu/~schwartz/DCAM16.pdf>)—he explores the 'trick of accounting' as 'followed by the entire higher education community' so as to keep 'hidden from public view' the mis-use of tuition fees not for teaching the students who pay them but to subsidise the research activity of the faculty; he reckons a mere 20% (sic) of faculty time is at the chalk-face and hence barely \$7k of the student's \$12k fee at Berkeley is spent on providing his/her undergraduate education (Schwartz is an Emeritus Professor of Physics at UC Berkeley).

Here in the UK the Black Box in the case of understanding the economics of HE ensures we have only the vaguest notion of how the £9250 is actually spent by universities—we know there is a massive subsidy from the 'profit' on the higher fees got from international students to the funding of research in some universities but we can only guess at the diversion of academic time notionally funded by UK undergraduates' fees to research activity and also at the use of such fee income to finance the debt that many universities have so wildly taken on in recent years.

⁵ B. Caplan, 2018, *The Case against Education: Why the Education System is a Waste of Time and Money* (Princeton University Press). Caplan asserts that at university level the vast cost for taxpayer and the family/student is substantially about funding HE as a mere signalling process rather than as the creation of human capital.

⁶ R.K. Vedder, 2019, *Restoring the Promise: Higher Education in America* (Independent Institute). Vedder is a veteran observer of HE and launches his latest broadside at US HE which in essence amounts to a stark and challenging conclusion: that never before have so many students attended university for so long in terms of years but with so few hours per week of academic activity and having to do so at such great cost while learning so little, and then graduating into so much underemployment; and never before have so many universities achieved less while spending more and while being managed at such great cost by so many bureaucrats! He especially notes the reallocation of tuition fees to support the research mission—'Is robbing Peter (undergraduate students) to pay Paul (researchers) a wise policy?'. And he comments on the steadily declining time spent by students on academic work while miraculously still gaining ever higher grades...as well as on just how light is the teaching load of the average tenured faculty member.

One of his most telling factoids is: 'In 1970, 1 out of every 150 taxi drivers had a bachelor's degree; 40 years later, it was 24 out of 150.' Like Caplan he reluctantly concludes that there is far too much costly HE and far too great a waste of taxpayer resources given 'universities' spending perversities' and their abuse of 'the academic cartel of accreditation' that serves as 'a barrier to entry and innovation' by way of new competi-

tive players. Like the next reference Vedder has grave concerns over ‘the weakness of current university governance’ – as bedevilled by ‘trustee ignorance and capture’. He calls for more ‘information’ (the opening of that Black Box), better ‘incentives’ to get faculty to bother to teach, and greater ‘innovation’ in how that teaching is delivered – and for an end to the universities’ monopoly over credentialisation, the reduction of the swollen number of university bureaucrats, an increase in faculty teaching loads, better use of the institution’s space and the introduction of year-round teaching (back to that inefficiency by way of the very long medieval vacation...).

⁷ J.V. Koch & R.J. Cebula, 2020, ‘*Runaway College Costs: How College Governing Boards fail to protect their Students*’ (The Johns Hopkins University Press). These authors explore the agency problem identified in Martin (Note 4) whereby those supposedly governing the university in terms of its broad strategy fail to do so in the interest of key stakeholders such as the taxpayer and the student funding the institution, and instead defer too much to the vested rent-seeking behaviours of those managing the entity and of those privileged tenured faculty within it.

⁸ P. Mandler, 2020, ‘*The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain’s Transition to Mass Higher Education since the Second World War*’ (Oxford University Press). He makes the point that the remorseless expansion of HE and its APR (Age Participation Ratio – now topping 50% in the UK, up from c10% in 1970) is driven by social aspiration: I go to Uni in 1972 as the first in generations of Mancunian Palfreymans to get anywhere near tertiary education let alone HE, and then I duly expect my two children to go in the 2000s. As Mandler puts it: ‘No-one has yet lost any money in betting on widening participation, and a continued upgrading of educational qualifications, far into the future.’ The same ratchet effect of expectation and aspiration, Mandler explains, drives the 1960s push towards comprehensives as the norm for secondary schooling and also towards the growth of the sixth-form. The 1960s/70s Robbins HE expansion begets further HE expansion by the late-1980s and, lo, we move progressively, to use the Trow taxonomy, from ‘elite’ to ‘expanded elite’ to ‘mass’ HE (next stop ‘universal’ HE with an APR of 80%+ as in Korea or Norway? – or perhaps universal TE if one is more imaginative in terms of what to count as valid and credible post-18 opportunities?). The pace is unstoppable – except by a very brave politician willing to deny free or relatively subsidised HE to the aspiring and growing middle-class.

Unstoppable unless, perhaps, the relevant socio-economic segment works out for itself that HE with hefty tuition fees is not vfm for too many entering it and taking on debt to pay for it? – and/or the cunning politician conjures up attractive alternatives such as shorter (and cheaper, not least because it is ‘live-at-home’) FE/TE vocational qualifications? The genie of HE (arguably, over-)expansion can’t readily be put back into the Treasury bottle but its continued growth can perhaps be curtailed by making less costly vocational FE more attractive as part of joined-up TE, and anyway for a variety of reasons (including graduate under-employment) the HE balloon is perhaps deflating: cue the Augar Report and the impending White Paper on this Government’s HE policy as a means of applying a little pressure to the HE balloon... And already some canny V-Cs can see the writing on the wall so they are strategically repositioning their universities as the ‘hub’ institutions for the delivery of TE in support of the potential exciting resetting of their region’s economy in a post-Brexit Britain.

⁹ In D. Palfreyman & P. Temple, 2017, ‘*Universities and Colleges: A Very Short Introduction*’ (Oxford University Press) we conclude with a chapter on ‘Futures for the university and college’, recognising such issues (*inter alia*) as shocks to the flows of international students and their lucrative fees (cue Covid!), the fact that ‘new digital learning modes may become more effective’ (cue Covid again!), ‘the build-up of un-/under-employed graduates’, the question of ‘whether higher education growth has now peaked in many rich countries’, the impact of AI on teaching and learning.

¹⁰ In D. Palfreyman & T. Tapper, 2014, ‘*Reshaping the University: The Rise of the Regulated Market in Higher Education*’ (Oxford University Press) we predicted much of what appeared in HERA17 (the Higher Education and Research Act 2017) and its recognition of the need for Government to protect the consumer interest of the fee-paying student (hence the creation of the OfS (the Office for Students) – although we had thought in terms of an OFTE as the Office for Tertiary Education). As the current Government reviews the FE+HE=TE equation and may yet rescue the Augar Report from the Whitehall long-grass we could yet see our OFTE emerge?

¹¹ In D.J. Farrington & D. Palfreyman, 2021, ‘*The Law of Higher Education*’ (Oxford University Press) we set out the HERA/OfS regime and yet again (as in our 2012 second edition) call for there to be a standardised, comprehensive, clear and fair University-Student (Business to Consumer, B2C) contract so as better to protect the student interest in getting vfm from that annual fee of £9250.

¹² J. Brennan & P. Magness, 2019, ‘*Cracks in the Ivory Tower: The Moral Mess of Higher Education*’ (Oxford University Press). In stressing how the competitive fixation with research has cheated undergraduates out of adequately resourced teaching, B&M note the role of posh publishing houses: ‘You’ll notice this book was published by Oxford University Press, not Nowhere State University Press. That’s no accident – our employers expect us to hit the best presses.’ That said, such a publisher by no means guarantees anybody reads said text: as far as I can tell nobody in academe has ever been bothered by our 2014 ‘*Reshaping the University*’ OUP book, although it seems the Universities Minister (Jo Johnson MP) read it and made his Team do so as HERA17 was being crafted...).

Brennan & Magness note that the ‘research brand’ of the U matters to its students – it helps signal their employability far more than anything they have been taught, other than in a few very vocational subject areas: students ‘are rationally more concerned with the prestige of their university than the quality of its teaching’ (and hence may not oppose the leakage of their tuition fees into subsidising their professors’ research hobby), given that ‘the credential, not the learning, is what opens doors for them’ in signalling to employers that ‘they are smart and perseverant, willing to play by the prevailing rules and meet society’s expectations’. Thus the ‘implicit bargain between faculty and students’ in which neither asks for much work on the part of the other and so ‘the faculty publish while the students play’.

David Palfreyman is a member of the Office for Students Board. He writes here in a personal capacity.

Not
the
Gazette

NB The *Oxford Magazine* is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

The next issue of Oxford
Magazine will appear in
second week

to sing of soap in desperate times

in spite of palm plantations,
felled rainforests and effluence,
in spite of plastic dispensers,
in spite of nitroglycerine,
in spite of a name that categorises
life-long dramas

to sing of soap is to sing *al-galy*,
wood ash that lends its name to alkali,
to sing rainwater and to sing oils,
olive, vegetable, sesame, and not to mourn
an absence of tallow - for who wants
to rub the fat of a cow on their skin?

to sing some soap names but not others,
to sing Pears, Dove and Lifebuoy,
but not Imperial Leather, a name saddled with empire,
whose legacy refuses to be washed down the plughole

to sing of the soap my daughter gave me,
nettle and seaweed, astringent shore,
field margin, seawater, kelp, ribbon of nori

to sing soap is to sing my grandmother lathering
a slip of Palmolive for skin and laundry and then
to sing the green unrinsed forgetfulness
streaking her long white hair

to sing my sister's gift of a bar of soap
is to sing a fourth dimension containing
the bloom of two lavender bushes

to sing soap is to sing a child
sifting pink stars through fingers
in a bucket of water and soapwort at the living museum

to sing soap was to choose on days
when the French market still came to town
from *les savons de Marseille*,
fenouil, citron, or muguet des bois,

to sing soap is to sing Happy Birthday twice
congratulating yourself like a prime minister

or to watch Gloria Gaynor washing
her hands, singing 'I will survive'
for twenty glorious seconds of being alive

Siskin

They say if you teeter at the edge
of the lake with a fishing net,
you may dredge up bottles
that a writer threw in at the party,
watching them float, then drown
as water filled their bodies.

They say the women
were dressed as yellowly
as azaleas and tossed in the corks
to bob along, then slow
in duck weed.

On the day before
the last day I ever saw you,
dragonflies shone in lines
of turquoise, hovered over
the lake's green darkness,
and its drowned may.

I didn't want
to imagine you dying,
and so I pulled us both
into the party, while
a siskin sang in the trees.

Look at them/us unfolding the deck chairs
and fixing their frames.
There was the sound of an argument,
dogs barking, the hiss of adders.

Give them/us, the protagonists,
the heat of the garden wall,
anger and politics, a love triangle,
antagonists. We/they will play the triangle
with a tiny spanner and listen
to its delicate water music,
while we drink champagne.

Then, imagine, years later,
a jeroboam rising
from the mud wrack
to tell the argument,
as if it lived again.

At the Stone Chamber of an Ancient Village

I wonder what the old herdsmen
knew of impositions of holiness
and why rainwater in a stone with a hollow,
once a quern or prop for a post,

now translates to a bowl of blessing.
A druid priest, yellow fluorescent jacket
over hooded linen robe, summons
the four winds to bless the bride

in her found wedding dress and trainers
and to bless the groom, tweeded out
like a young Edwardian farmer,
while the witnesses hold hands,

make almost another round house
of their arched arms and baggy fleeces
to pray to the spirits of bramble and bird,
their feet planted on the roof

of the underground chamber. Inside,
the gap in earth lends light
to luminous moss. A woman tells us
how she spent the night here once,

‘What we saw, I cannot say,
but when we called the spirits,
the moss grew greener, brighter,
and we were changed.’

Through the earth’s gap, we hear
the wind shaking towers of foxgloves,
rattling gorse and heather,
while clouds fall through

the lantern of this grave pantheon
into its pool. Now the sky moves
under earth, and the present blows in,
a magpie’s feather, petals of a wild rose

loosened from the bride’s bouquet,
a phone’s ringtone, the song of the druid party,
who, above us, welcome the rain,
turn laughing faces to the storm.

The Summoner of Birds

A rounded woman, her hair up
in a sea-coloured net, wearing a blue dress,
a white apron, carrying a bowl on her hip,
walks out of now, walks out of time,
walks out onto the pebbles, steps
over the winch’s chain to the wash
of small waves to summon a gyre
of gulls and their cries.

She pauses
where the stream pours into the sea,
lifts the bowl from her hip
and, in one curved move, flings
knuckle bones, neck joints, spareribs,
arrows of seabass, sole and cod
into the air to drop in a moment’s fall
till snatched by the beaks of the gulls
and carried up again, while sand pipers
pick the beach clean, and the winch
weighs down the scene.

Then, comes a winged giant along the Todden
threatening death, but underneath
an actor works his wings.

Mostly, what I miss
in these soon after days, is our talk,
what I would have said, what you
would have made of this. The shadows
of things, of gulls, of paper wings, of bones
play out on the harbour’s shore,
with one witness less. And now,
the woman in the blue dress
picks up the empty bowl and returns
to the inn. The giant folds his wings.
Even with you gone, I shape this story,
and ask, what do you make of this?

NOTICE

Jane Griffiths, literary editor of the *Oxford Magazine*, will be pleased to read literary submissions of any description—e.g. verse, critical prose, very short stories, segments of dialogue, reviews of new dramatic productions and books, etc. Submissions should be no longer than 750 words, and where possible should be sent by email attachment to jane.griffiths@ell.ox.ac.uk together with a two-sentence bio.

Through a glass darkly

Here is a WhatsApp film of deer running. Your scene in my hand, in my head. Here is your painting on a studio floor. Here is a sand martin flying into a cliff. Replay. Here is your girlfriend in the snow, in a headscarf, in an old Soviet spa. Replay. Here you are dressed as Jamiroquai dancing through a hallway in Peckham Rye. Replay. Several times. Sigh. Here are your paints. Here are your plants. Here is a crown of cauliflower cooked in coconut cream. Here you are with your hair dyed pink. Here are your octopus arms playing the drums. Here you are pulling a face on the band's merch, fierce Viking of our ancestry. Here is a mole digging out our car with shovel nose and tiny hands. And here I am herding the mole away. Here is a snail, vision blurred and monochrome: grief. For indistinct fluorescent banded sight, my tear-blurred eyes, see through the pinprick gazes of a clam. But to reprise. Here is a film of your legs in a garden pond seen through your eyes. Here is the sound of a thrush, singing the streets of South London. Here are ransoms glowing in a wood. You didn't learn the words we used to learn and their strange poetry. In these days of social distance, I must admit that knowing how to use WhatsApp is a greater emotional hit. But missing you, the actual you, the both of you, I want to quote old words from a lost faith, *now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face*. At each electric bleep, this is my paraphrased prayer. *Now darkly, soon face to face*.

STEPHANIE NORGATE

Stephanie Norgate is a poet and Royal Literary Fund Fellow. Her two poetry collections are *Hidden River* (2008) and *The Blue Den* (2012), both published by Bloodaxe Books. Her third collection, *The Conversation*, will be published by Bloodaxe later this year. A chapter about the imagery of houses in her poetry appeared in *Architectural Space and the Imagination* (eds. Griffiths, J. & A. Hanna, Palgrave, 2020).

Man with bird

(a photograph by Edith Tudor Hart, 1937)

What does she want us to see –
that a man who has worked all his life
down the pit, in the shipyard
may still get up
wash his face, roll up his sleeves,
walk out
into a spring morning

that he may bend down
pick up the fledgling thrush
he finds in the yard,
let it quieten in the cup-
nest of his hand,
that there might still be
tenderness

Sandpipers, Alnmouth

(a painting by Winifred Nicholson, 1933)

You're sitting on the beach
in your duffel coat

(it's fresh this May morning)

you paint the bay, deep
blue

dunes, pale ochre
gritty (you added sand to the paint)

a milky sky,
a curve of estuary

then you hear them
those three shrill notes

they're flying low
flickering

gliding for a moment,
a semi-circle over

water, over your still-
wet canvas

SUE LEIGH

Sue Leigh's collection of poems, *Chosen Hill*, is published by Two Rivers Press (2018). The *TLS* described it as 'an intelligent and considered collection that pays homage to the act of paying attention'. Her work has been published in magazines and journals including *Areté*, *The Spectator* and the *TLS*. She lives in the Windrush valley and spends much time walking.

Devaduta (Messenger of the Gods) – Reflections on the Rohingya and Imaginary Conversations with Daw Suu

PETER CAREY

It was a vile night – pelting rain and wind squalls. As black as pitch – the very thought of going home on such a night made me feel anxious. We had no customers and as the maghrib (6 p.m.) call to prayer rang out from our local mosque I decided I should let my three male Indonesian shop assistants off early. But fate decided otherwise: no sooner had the thought of early closure sped my mind than a ‘customer’ appeared. But this was no ordinary wallpaper client. Arriving on a 250cc trail bike, he swung his powerful machine off the main road and swooped down to park by the far corner of our shophouse row. Spurning the Korean wallpaper rolls and Italian tiles, the close-cropped stranger crouched down under the eaves of our shop seeking shelter from the rain. Who was this mysterious guest?

“Come on, Mr Peter, ask the gentleman to come in!” my senior shop assistant, Jaenal, pressed me: “he is going to get soaked through!”

“Ok, quickly now, bring him in, Jaenal! We will not close early this evening!”

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than a well-built young man was ducking into our shop, Jaenal a pace behind, an awkward smile playing on his lips. As I went forward, Jaenal whispered urgently in my ear – “Look out, Sir! Did you see? On his right thigh? An automatic weapon!” My eye immediately slid down to his midriff and there in a holster strapped to his upper leg was the snubbed-nosed form of a Glock-17 Austrian-made semi-automatic pistol, standard issue for the Gegana Indonesian Anti-Terrorist police! My blood ran cold! Suburban Gading Serpong suddenly no longer seemed so reassuring!

Before I knew it, the words were tumbling from my mouth: “Excuse me, Sir, but who are you? And why are you going around with a pistol like this?” My eye then flicked towards the Glock 17 semi-automatic nestling neatly against his thigh. “Maybe for Indonesians, a police officer [I had surmised that my guest was some sort of security official] coming fully armed into a high street shop is not so unusual, but for an Englishman like myself it is frankly extraordinary and”, my voice tailed off. I felt at a loss and increasingly frightened. Sensing my discomfort, my guest immediately moved to reassure me: “Sir, thank for you for inviting me in out of the rain! I appreciate it very much! But it’s like this – for two days and nights now I have hardly slept as I have been moving around on constant patrol guarding our local South Tangerang regional police headquarters and Tangerang City police station against attacks by local militants. I also have to oversee the security of our the 100+ local Buddhist temples (*vihara*) as the militants – ‘*teroris*’ [terrorists] were his words – are all fired up about the news of the massacres of their Rohingya co-religionists in Rakhine State, Myanmar! It’s truly a dreadful situation, Sir!”

Rohingya, Rakhine, Myanmar, Burma as I knew it? The border area of western Burma stretching along the frontier with neighbouring Bangladesh, an area settled by Arab and Persian Muslim migrants since the late seventh century? Was this the area now being championed by the desperados in South Tangerang? Was this the albatross hanging like a bloody trophy around the neck of my unexpected guest with his powerful trail bike and Austrian-made sidearm? And then in a flash my thoughts sped back to my Oxford days. Did this not involve my friend Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner (1991) and now State Counsellor – since 6 October 2016 *de facto* head of the ‘civilian’ government – of the Union of Myanmar? Were the actions of the local Tangerang ‘terrorists’ not directly linked to Daw [Auntie] Suu’s refusal since June 2012 – when news first broke of the new *Tatmadaw* (Burmese army) campaigns against the Rohingya population – to speak truth to power? Her silence in the face of growing evidence of atrocities against the local civilian population had helped create this desperate situation. Every action – inaction in Daw Suu’s case – has consequences! But, wait a minute, how could someone whom I had known since the late 1970s with such high ideals behave in this fashion?

* * *

When I was close to Daw Suu and her family in Oxford in those two decades which spanned our first 1978 meeting up to her husband, Michael’s, death in March 1999, she had seemed such a doughty fighter for Burma’s democratic future, someone who had not flinched at condemning the brutalities of the Burmese military. While suffering sixteen long years of house arrest in her Yangon home, 54 University Avenue, far from her family, she had borne every hardship with fortitude, choosing to remain in Burma rather than be at her husband, Michael Aris’s (1946-1999), bedside as he lay dying of prostate cancer in an Oxford hospital in the early months of 1999. His passing on 27 March 1999 – precisely on his 53rd birthday – and his funeral four days later at the Oxford Crematorium were amongst the most poignant events I had ever witnessed: Daw Suu’s bouquet for Michael’s coffin were just wild spring daffodils, daisies and primroses gathered from the adjacent fields, mirroring the words of the Japanese Zen poet, Kobayashi Issa: “Never forget: we walk on the roof of hell gazing at flowers!”

This was the democratic fighter who had declared that her fight was “Burma’s Second Struggle for Independence!” – the first having been against the British colonial power in the first half of the twentieth century, and the second now being waged against the usurping powers of the *Tatmadaw*! This was the daughter of the founder of modern Burma, Bogoyoke (General Aung San (1915-

1947)), the independence leader who had negotiated the historic Panglong Agreement in Southern Shan State on 12 February 1947—now celebrated annually as Burma’s Union Day—when three leading Burmese minorities—the Shan, Kachin and Chin—had been made a promise that they would enjoy “full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas” and when the Kachin had been promised their own state in a federal constitution sanctioned by the Constituent Assembly in Yangon.

Since establishing her pro-democracy, NLD (National League for Democracy), party on 27 September 1988, Daw Suu had come into a political coalition with former Prime Minister, U Nu (1907-1995; in office 1948-1956/1957-58/1960-62), founder of the League for Democracy, Peace and Freedom (LDPF) (9 September 1988), a loose alliance of democratic forces. It was U Nu who had announced in 1948—the year of my birth in Yangon (30 April)—that the Rohingya would be given the same autonomous rights as other ethnic minorities in the Union of Burma. Furthermore, in order to ensure that those areas of the Union of Burma with Muslim majority populations would be properly represented in Burma’s parliament (*Pyithu Hluttaw*), Nu, a devout Buddhist, ensured that there should always be a minimum of two Muslim members in the popular assembly. This enlightened policy remained in force until March 1962 when Nu was finally ousted in a military coup carried out by General Ne Win (in office, 1962-1987). A fascist military regime then began unpicking the constitutional gains of the immediate post-independence era and oppressing Burma’s minorities, with the Rohingya and other Muslim inhabitants of the Union losing their citizenship rights entirely in 1982.

If Burma’s “Second Struggle for Independence” led by Daw Suu was against the *Tatmadaw* how come the Burmese democracy icon found herself in the same boat as the generals following her release from her final period of house arrest in November 2010? How, moreover, could she have provided spurious legitimacy to the genocidal activities of the Burmese Army in Rakhine State during the military’s scorched and civilian massacre operations launched on 25 August 2017 following the ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) attacks on police and security posts? According to a recent (27 August 2018) United Nations report, 7,000 children now in refugee camps in Bangladesh as unaccompanied minors were forced to watch their parents killed in front of them, 17,000 women and girls were gang raped, 34,000 were flung onto the fires of their burning houses and a total of 700,000—two thirds of Rakhine’s original population—had to flee for their lives to neighbouring Bangladesh, where they joined upwards of 300,000 other Rohingya who had escaped from previous ethnic pogroms, in squalid and overcrowded camps near the border town of Cox’s Bazaar.

The Head of the Indonesian Human Rights Commission (1998-2003) and former Indonesian Attorney General (1999-2001), Marzuki Darusman, chair of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar which compiled the UN Report, reflected that ‘our findings are grim—it is hard to fathom the level of brutality [of the Burmese military and Rakhine Buddhists] who participated in the attacks’, adding that the perpetrators had shown throughout a ‘total disregard for civilian life’. Exactly a year earlier, Darusman’s UN colleague, Human Rights Commissioner, Prince Zeid Ra’ad al-Husseini (in

office, 2014-2018), an experienced Jordanian diplomat, had described such brutality as being ‘like a textbook example of ethnic cleansing’, one which recalled the genocide perpetrated by the Turks against the Armenian populations of the Ottoman Empire (1915-1917) when at least 1.5 million perished.

As *de facto* head of the supposedly ‘civilian’ government in Burma, Daw Suu, in the view of the UN investigators, failed to use her ‘moral authority’ to protect civilians with her government ‘contributing to the commission of atrocity crimes’ by letting hate speech thrive and destroying documents implicating her government in the operations in Rakhine. In brief, she failed to shield minorities from crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is perhaps significant here that Daw Suu’s party, the National League for Democracy, has fielded not a single Muslim candidate in the recent 2015 elections—a far cry from the situation which pertained under former Prime Minister U Nu before March 1962—and she herself has shown personal antipathy towards Muslims more than once. One thinks here of her comment after a particularly torrid BBC interview on 24 October 2013, fronted by the BBC Today programme’s sole Muslim presenter, Mishal Husain, and focussed on the plight of Burma’s Muslim minority, that ‘no one told me I was going to be interviewed by a Muslim!’ (Peter Popham, *The Lady and the Generals: Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma’s Struggle for Freedom* [London: Rider, 2016], p.256).

The duty of a leader of Daw Suu’s standing in Prince Zeid’s view, is clear: to set a moral example for her people. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is obviously one such leader who throughout his life as an advocate of non-violence in the struggle for India’s freedom had always been consistent in his conviction that achieving such a goal would be pointless without Hindu-Muslim friendship and the abolition of untouchability. If his fellow countrymen and women were not prepared to hear or act on this message, then Gandhi always said that he would be happy to furl his flag and go to live in the Himalayas. If Gandhi’s example was setting the bar too high, then, in Prince Zeid’s estimation, Daw Suu had another clear course to follow, namely, resign from the government and return to house arrest, thus creating clear water between herself and the Burmese *génocidaires* in the *Tatmadaw*. That way she could again become a beacon for her people. But “the Lady”, as she is known, chose the path of silence. And not just silence, but also active connivance in hate speech, the profiling of the Muslim minority and wilful destruction of evidence. She became, in effect, the Radovan Karadžić, of Burma—a civilian apologist for genocide.

Why?

* * *

If I could summon Daw Suu before me and meet her face-to-face in an altered reality universe what might we share together?

I am sure my former friend would immediately take me to task: “But, Peter, you never really knew me! I am not a Burmese version of Joan of Arc, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King. I am not even an Abdurrahman Wahid—Gus Dur—your remarkable fourth President (1999-2001) who did so much to defend and enlarge the interests of the minorities in the early stages of the *Reformasi* in Indonesia (1998 to present). I don’t

aspire to that level! How can I? My world is small and confined to my main constituency, namely my fellow Burman Buddhists! I am not a global human rights activist or icon and nor do I wish to be. You could call me 'a frog under the coconut shell' to borrow your Malay phrase.

And as for the issue of the refolement or driving out of non-Burman populations like the Bengalis whom you British brought into the country in their hundreds of thousands in the colonial era (1826-1948) I regard this as perfectly legitimate. We are just putting to right the wrongs of the century, and more, in which Burma was ruled by you hated white *Kalas* as a province of British India (1826-1936)! And all this jumping up and down by the UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the like about the "genocide" perpetrated by our brave army in Rakhine—that's all just so much guff—hoax news! We were responding to genuine terrorist threats from those ungrateful Muslim interlopers. I would have thought an intelligent person like yourself, Peter, who grew up in Burma, would have more sense than to buy into all that propaganda! But so be it—if you want to believe all that nonsense that's your problem! At the end of the day there are only two countries which really matter to us now—India and China with the latter by far the most important!

As for the rest—especially those Muslim majority countries like Malaysia and Indonesia which you seem so happy to live in—well frankly we don't give a toss for them. It doesn't surprise me at all when you tell me about armed anti-terrorist police coming into your shop—that's the default setting of Muslims—either at your feet or at your throat! Remember mid-19th century Burma when maps of the world were being drawn in the royal palaces in Ava and Mandalay showing Burma at the centre of the world and our country known as the "hermit kingdom"—well, we are still living those notions now in our ever so special Burman Buddhist community. You remember, don't you, that we were the only ones in our region who were able to defeat the Mongol invaders! And remember too, Peter, that I am a child of a military family—my father was a general who with his own bare hands murdered an Indian Muslim headman and flung his body into a pigsty as the Burma Independence Army (BIA) marched into the country on the coattails of the Japanese! *That's* my default setting! I am an unreconstructed Burman nationalist. Why! I even represent the same delta constituency in the Pyithu Hluttaw as my late father! The bean sprout never strays far from the bean poll!"

* * *

And my reply?

"Daw Suu, my dear friend, every morning I get up at five o'clock to spend an hour in meditation and every morning I 'meet' you vicariously because I always use the Chin blanket you gave me when I met you at 54 University Avenue on 19 June 1996 in Yangon to celebrate your 51st birthday! That little handwoven blanket is for me a symbol of what you once were and a witness to those years together in Oxford when I knew you and your family and we all had so much hope for the future of Burma. Whatever has happened since will for me never take away the reality of those years and what we shared together. You will always remain my friend. Call that romanticism. But it is what I feel in my heart.

But now I feel that—for whatever reasons—you have chosen entirely the wrong road! You have intentionally—it seems—provided protection and justification for the most unspeakable crimes carried out by your army. This in my book is completely unacceptable! The safety and welfare of upwards of a million Burmese Muslims were—and still are—in your hands and you have betrayed them! Indeed, far from extending protection you have actively participated in the vile acts of the Burmese military by allowing hate speech to flourish, destroying evidence, and engaging in a wilful denial of sustained crimes against humanity *urbi et orbi*.

For me all your moral stature has vanished like snow on a summer's day and you stand as you really are like the *Portrait of Dorian Grey*. But please remember that everything you have struggled for will now be completely at widdershins and the precise *opposite* of what you think you are achieving! You and your friends in the *Tatmadaw* constantly boast that all your actions are to protect the integrity of the Burmese state and to preserve the Union. But stop deluding yourselves! Far from guaranteeing your country's sovereignty you have destroyed it! You have handed Burma bound hand and foot to the Chinese who deal with their own Muslim minorities in the same way you have dealt with the Rohingya. They will now be your principal protectors against those international bodies which accuse you of genocide! But remember the Chinese will demand a price for their protection! They are busy creating their One Belt One Road circle of client states in an arc of oppression which stretches from Pyongyang to Phnom Penh and Pegu. In Tenasserim Division, their plans for a naval base at Matthew's Island, are already far advanced and every year 25,000 Chinese citizens are moving into Upper Burma (Sagaing and Mandalay Divisions) after buying the identity cards of dead Burmese!

This is your karma! In a generation Burma will be the Latvia of Southeast Asia and you will go down in history as Burma's modern U Ba Than, the traitor who led General Prendergast's troops to the very gates of Mandalay in November 1885. Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind! *Adieu!*"

You gave it all to the fight including that which should not be given.

All of it,

The ability to love,

To think and to feel.

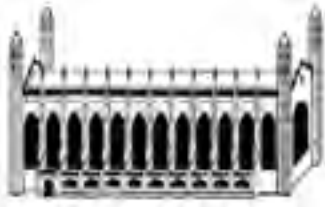
All of you nothing spared.

But how do you live without yourself?

(Naum Korzhavin's (1925-2018) epitaph for Anna Mikhailovna Pankratova (1897-1957) who sacrificed her husband and family to Beria's secret police (NKVD))

Serpong

21 September 2018



Notes from Cambridge

IN November, when Cambridge published the annual Roll of the Regent House which fixes membership for the year¹ it was longer than that of the previous year² which had been a good deal longer than the one before that.³ The second increase had removed the age-limit of 70⁴ and also allowed the retired to keep their Regent House membership (provided they remained 'active participants in the University's affairs') after the *Reporter* of 24 June 2020 announced that the Privy Council had approved the necessary amendments to Statute, III, 11.⁵ The first increase had added entitlement for many contract researchers, with more complex changes still needed and anticipated.

This double change took some time to bring about. In the Easter Term 2017 a Grace—a counterpart of a Congregation Resolution—was created by 51 members of the Regent House.⁶ It proposed the removal of the age-limit on membership. In its Notice discussing the implications the Council pointed out that there would have to be some delay so that the colleges could be consulted. Although employment by the University in certain categories qualified an individual for membership, 'the position for College Fellows is different in that there is not necessarily a contractual relationship between the Fellows and their College'. The Grace was therefore 'set aside' while the consultation proceeded. The Council had 'received the comments from the colleges at its meeting on 22 January 2018'. Its Notice was dated 5 February and published in the *Reporter* of 7 February.⁷

The *Notice* also mentioned that it was aware 'that the age limit is only one of a number of issues concerning the membership of the Regent House that have been identified for review'. It said it was 'separately proposing an amendment to Ordinance to grant membership of the Regent House to Directors of Research and Principal Research Associates'. The necessary *Report* also appeared on 7 February 2018.⁸

The problem arose from the very structure of academic employment in Cambridge. The 'top jobs' for academics are the 'established' University Teaching Offices. These carry automatic membership of the Regent House and of Faculties, and the protections of Cambridge's legislative counterpart of Oxford's Statute XII.⁹ Lacking the option of making conjoint appointments Colleges often offer Fellowships to University Teaching Offices without more than a nominal stipend, but they make their own separate appointments of salaried College Lecturers under their own Statutes. That was one of the reasons why college comment was essential before changes to membership of the Regent House could be put forward for approval.

By contrast 'contract researchers' are 'unestablished' and they do not enjoy the same employment protections. Theirs may be changed without reference to the Regent House.¹⁰ Nor is their eligibility for membership of the Regent House or of Faculties automatic. The levels of such appointments are roughly aligned with those of University Teaching Officers, so that a Director of Research is the

equivalent of a Professor, a Principal Research Associate the equivalent of a Reader, a Senior Research Associate the equivalent of a Lecturer. But that is determined at the discretion of the Department or Faculty concerned.¹¹ Lowlier postdocs on research contracts did not have membership of the Regent House, but calling them Research Assistants (Grade 5) or Research Associates (Grade 7) also depended on the Faculty or Department. So the automatic inclusion of these unestablished postholders in the Regent House would mean a considerable shift of entitlement in the direction of increasing the numbers.

The ensuing Discussion flagged up the potential unfairness of the discretion to classify contract researchers under what was then an Ordinance under Statute A, III, 10(e). The first speaker pointed out that while the categories of staff with nominal equivalence to University Teaching Offices 'automatically become Regents if they are employed at departments not under the control of any Faculty', the 'option to filter out postdoctoral researchers is exercised entirely according to Faculties' whims, but that deprived them of Regent House membership.¹²

On 18 April 2018 the Council submitted Graces approving the recommendations in Paragraph 3 of that Report, which would amend the Ordinance and include in the Regent House the holders of certain, but not all, of the unestablished contract research posts.¹³ An Amendment signed by 26 members of the Regent House was submitted. The Council decided to call a ballot on the Amendment as a Grace in its own right.¹⁴

Both the original Grace and the Grace-Amendment were voted on postally in Michaelmas Term, just before the new Roll was promulgated, so by those who were on the Roll of the Regent House which had been promulgated in November 2017. Among half a dozen Flysheets, one pointed out that to approve the unamended Grace would be to deprive a great many Research Associates of their current membership given them because of local policy where their posts happened to lie. Another pointed out that the Faculty membership which was a requirement for Regent House membership was 'so variably applied across the university that it is inherently unfair'. The Amendment, it was argued out in another Flysheet, would introduce consistency by requiring only a three-year qualifying period of employment in a research post.¹⁵ The voting between the two Graces was close but application of the single transferable vote regulations gave the victory to the Grace-Amendment version.¹⁶

That left the age-limit question unresolved. In December 2018, taking up the question set aside in February, a *Report* appeared proposing the change to the age limit together with other adjustments. Among them was the creation of a new Special Ordinance A (i), bringing together in one place the categories of 'persons' the Registry was in future to inscribe on the Roll of the Regent House. Any provision affecting members of a college was to be subject to its consent.¹⁷

The new Roll was not introduced entirely smoothly in November 2019. Readers of the *Reporter* had perhaps not been keeping up. The Registry's usual publication of the 'Proposed' Roll in October had included the request for any omissions or errors to be pointed out before 21 October:

'Members of the Regent House are asked to check the list and to make sure that their entries are correct. Notice of any corrections or amendments should be sent in writing to the Registry at the Old Schools.'

There were sudden cries when the Roll was published in November. In December a Notice had to be published, 'exceptionally' admitting that:

*'owing to an administrative oversight, changes in the status of 45 individuals which made them eligible for Regent House membership were not reported promptly. Emails were invited by 20 January in order that the additions might be published on 5 February.'*¹⁸

So the Regent House now bulges with new young members and restored retired members. Congregation membership still suffers from an age-limit (at 75) and arguably a degree of inconsistency in the application of principles on which membership may be granted by a Faculty or Department. The University may find itself under similar pressures to those which have changed things in Cambridge.

But what are likely to be the consequences of the continuing expansion of those entitled to vote in a direct democracy, not just for their representatives (in Cambridge as members of the Council and the Board of Scrutiny), but directly in the taking of detailed decisions as the governing body of the University? It has long been a matter of concern in both Oxford and Cambridge that the effectiveness of their respective sovereign bodies is tested by the swelling of their numbers. It has also been noted for decades that, in both democracies, active participation in discussion and debate has grown less with the expansion of those entitled to take part.

G.R.EVANS

¹ <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2020-21/special/02/>

² <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2019-20/special/02/>

³ <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2018-19/special/03/>

⁴ The age-limit of 70 on membership of the Regent House was approved only in 1996.

⁵ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2019-20/weekly/6586/section1.shtml#heading2-6>

⁶ The creation of a Regent House Grace requires 50 signatures.

⁷ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2018-19/weekly/6519/section1.shtml#heading2-8>

⁸ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2017-18/weekly/6494/index.shtml>

⁹ Statutes and Ordinances, Schedule to Statute C, Chapter III, Special Ordinance C(xii) and Special Ordinance C(xiii).

¹⁰ <https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/disciplinary-action-grievances-and-appeals-0/disciplinary-grievances-and-appeals>

¹¹ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research-staff/employment-and-career-management/employment-and-career-management-scheme/researchers-employment-policies-and-protocols/job-titles-and-duties>

¹² <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2017-18/weekly/6497/section9.shtml#heading2-26>

¹³ Director of Research, Principal Research Associate, Senior Research Associate, Research Associate, Lecturer (unestablished), and Assistant Lecturer (unestablished)

¹⁴ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2017-18/weekly/6512/section1.shtml#heading2-5>

¹⁵ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2018-19/weekly/6524/section10.shtml>

¹⁶ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2018-19/weekly/6524/section9.shtml>

¹⁷ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2018-19/weekly/6531/section6.shtml#heading2-21>

¹⁸ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2019-20/weekly/6571/section1.shtml#heading2-6>

Singing the Blues

Ensnared by lime high in a tree,
A small bird struggles to break free.
A fat cat watches from below
With razor claws and eyes aglow.
Higher and higher, undeterred,
Upwards it climbs towards the bird.

The small bird thinks: 'Dear me! That's that!
I'm bound to be eaten by that cat.
So I'll sing, and sing, and sing my song,
As long as I sing, things can't go wrong.
It's not all over till . . . I croak.'
(That bird, we guess, would get the joke.)

WILHELM BUSCH,
revamped by CHRIS WELLS and DAVID CRAM

Es sitzt ein Vogel auf dem Leim,
Er flattert sehr und kann nicht heim.
Ein schwarzer Kater schleicht herzu,
Die Krallen scharf, die Augen gluh.
Am Baum hinauf und immer höher,
Kommt er dem armen Vogel näher.

Der Vogel denkt: Weil das so ist
Und weil mich doch der Kater frisst,
Do will ich keine Zeit verlieren,
Will auch ein wenig quinquilieren
Und lustig pfeiffen wie zuvor.
Der Vogel, scheint mir, hat Humor.

WILHELM BUSCH (1832-1908)

Christopher Wells is Emeritus Fellow of St Edmund Hall and formerly University Lecturer in Germanic Philology and Medieval German Literature.

David Cram is Emeritus Fellow of Jesus College and erstwhile University Lecturer in General Linguistics..

REVIEWS

Formulae for forms

Brandon Taylor, *The Life of Forms in Art* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020).



Brandon Taylor's book is absolutely brilliant—but difficult. It really does unite and relate science and the arts in a deeper and more meaningful way than much stuff which gives lip-service to the idea of the liaison between the two cultures does. To get a minor gripe out of the way first: the title is the same as Henry Focillon's book on gothic architecture of 1942. Taylor mentions it briefly to say his work 'shares little with Focillon's in either method or topic', but I think he should be more specific.

Modern art has generated an awful lot of discourse and discussion. Isms proliferate: Orphism, Constructivism, Productivism, Suprematism, Neo-Plasticism, Concretionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, to name but a few. Sometimes the manifestos, declarations and critiques are more interesting than the products, which can be somewhat jejune and unattractive to look at. The movements have, ultimately, spawned conceptual art, in which the talk cavalierly dispenses, sometimes, with the necessity to produce the products. Which is why the public is so dismissive of it. The Emperor might not have any clothes, but that merely provides the opportunity for garrulous comment. As in the fairy tale.

It was in the nineteenth century that a crisis in human understanding was underway. The idea of the universe controlled by an intelligent divine mind was under attack, and with it the idea that human beings and nature were animated by a mysterious abstract force. The word which covered the beliefs was 'vitalism', and more and more questions were asked about its plausibility. *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) as a sceptic, although it is possible that in his *Cellular Pathology* (1858) he plagiarized Robert Remak's (1815-1865) theory of 1852 that cells are generated by cell division. Neither is mentioned by Taylor—still, one can't mention everything. Spirituality was replaced with a species of mechanism, expressed, for instance in Thomas Henry Huxley's essay 'On the Physical Basis of Life' (1868) (which Taylor does not mention, although he does mention his grandson Julian Huxley). All this posed challenges not just for a view of the physical world, but theories of consciousness and artistic expression.

Ruskin has a chapter 'Of Vital Beauty' in *Modern Painters* II (1846), but reading it now one wonders how anyone could believe such nonsense. Sorry. Still, modified vitalism has survived, and Taylor cites in support of his underlying perspective the case of Hans Driesch (1867-1941), who studied sea-urchins, and claimed that their cell division demonstrated 'organic regulation' which challenged the simply mechanistic accounts. This meant that "organicism" might even function as a model for the work of art.' He further cites the case of Otto Lehmann (1855-1922) and Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), who were 'prepared to say that evidence from the internal movement of crystals was such as to suggest the presence in them of sensation, feeling temperament—even "real life".' This neo-vitalist science is called entelechy. It is sad and ironical to think that the Natural History Museum in Oxford, built partly under Ruskin's aegis, would undermine all he stood for and drive him from his beloved city. His last appearance here, in 1884, was to attend a meeting of the anti-vissection society. He wrote, 'I cannot lecture in a room next to a shrieking cat, nor address myself to the men who have been—there's no word for it.' Ruskin would be distressed and disconcerted by the fact that Brandon Taylor is a Visiting Tutor in History and Theory of Art at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford. At first glance the museum's doorway, designed by John Hungerford Pollen and carved by Thomas Woolner, seems to represent a traditional neo-Gothic view of the sanctity of nature, but look closer (no one does, and Pevsner does not mention it) and one sees that the angel is holding not the infant Christ but a cell.



The door of the Natural History Museum, Oxford. Designed by John Hungerford Pollen, carved by Thomas Woolner. (Photograph by Bernard Richards)

Taylor covers his material in six dense chapters: Organicity, Biomorphism, Ambiguity, Monstrosity, Dialectics and Liquefaction. In broad terms the major division was between Dadaism, Surrealism and its off-shoots and what might be called the

abstract and geometrical, of which the major exponent is Mondrian. In the popular mind all modern art comes under the label 'abstract'. But as a term it needs major qualifications. What is impressive about Taylor's study is that he shows the way in which art is not hived off into a separate sanctum, but both influences and draws on the elements of surrounding life, be they political, sociological, philosophical, psychological, scientific, what have you. So that interest in the *gestalt* and holism, for instance, make their impact on art.

Of course Taylor's examples do not cover the whole of modern art. Happily running alongside the innovations were artists painting in an old-fashioned way, and in recent decades their efforts have borne fruit in a revival of representationalism, of the relatively traditional subject. One thinks of Lucian Freud, say. Not someone to be sneezed at. An artist such as John Piper put abstraction largely behind him when he went into topographical representation, and Paul Nash did not allow abstraction to place interest in the world out there permanently onto the back burner. The Wittenham Clumps were never forgotten.

The chapter on organicism gets the subject underway. There is a paradox here; that threatened with the mechanistic tyrannies of science artists sought to separate themselves and colonise the territory of the creative and subjective mind. And yet since traditionally artists dealt with the world its physical and chemical processes could not be ruled out of the account. Especially its organic processes. The chapter on biomorphism shows the way in which they made their impact and ended up influencing an artist such as Henry Moore. Quantum physics has further emphasised instability. Very few people these days would identify with Shakespeare's statement in Sonnet 15: 'When I consider that everything that grows / Holds in perfection but a little moment'.

The chapter I found most fascinating is the one on liquefaction. It has been a topic that has appealed to people for centuries. One thinks of Herrick:

*Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows
That liquefaction of her clothes.*

It goes back further than that, though, to Heraclitus. A classic instance is Antony's famous speech in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

*Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A towered citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen
these signs.
They are black vesper's pageants.
That which is now a horse, even with a
thought
The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.*

On other occasions clouds might resemble camels, whales or weasels. Michael Dobson says it should be called *Shakespeare: No Fear*. Closer to our own time there is Hopkins's powerful poem 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'. The instability both of nature and of the human being is a theme in Pater. Flux was studied at length by Henri Bergson in his philosophy of *durée*. Bergson is one of the most influential figures in this study.

Liquefaction and viscosity represent nature in its most fluid and ephemeral state, and inspired artists to allow the instability of liquid paint to take over. It presides over Tachisme. Dali especially was obsessed by the phenomenon:

'All my readers, I am sure, will have had the satisfaction of feeling that stubborn tenacity... that anxious perseverance that scoffs at the giddiness preceding the pleasure caused by the intimate act of causing to spurt out of the nose-pores... a slippery new, and aerodynamic comedo, more commonly known as a 'blackhead'.'

I'm not making this up. Taylor does not mention Orwell's essay 'Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on Salvador Dali' (1944). If I had been writing the book I should have done, because on the one hand it expresses disgust at the subject-matter, but on the other hand he does not want to be a simple philistine condemning innovation. The suspicion that Dali was sympathetic to fascism would have, to some extent, conditioned Orwell's views. He takes the sting out of Dali's tail by saying that stylistically the works remind him of Edwardian illustrations—Arthur Rackham, say. I very much regret that my much-loved colleague the late George Monteiro did not live to read the chapter. How he would have relished it, and his friend David H. Hirsch, also deceased.

When I was a visiting professor at Brown University in 1976 English studies were being invaded by other interests, which threatened to take over, and use literature as a pretext to talk about other things, so that women's studies, colonial studies etc. were appearing. In a flippant and facetious fantasy George Monteiro proposed that one could set up a university department of Viscous Studies. So here is the theme in Taylor, but entirely serious.

It would have been nice to see a reference to Kenneth Clark's excellent essay 'The Blot and the Diagram', given as the

Reed and Barton Design Lecture in 1962, then reprinted in *Encounter* (January 1963) and *Moments of Vision* (1981). It looks at the way in which modern art is torn between blottesque inspirations and intellectual and diagrammatic ones. He finds precedence in Leonardo's interest in random stains:

'you should look at certain walls stained with damp or at stones of uneven colour. If you have to invent some setting you will be able to see in these the likeness of divine landscapes, adorned with mountains, ruins, rocks, woods, great plains, hills and valleys in great variety; and then again you will see there battles and strange figures in violent action, expressions of faces and clothes and an infinity of things which you will be able to reduce to their complete and proper forms.'

Brandon Taylor mentions 'the old paranoiac wall of Leonardo' (p 202), but he doesn't make it to the index.

It's amazing to think of someone like Michael Sadler (1861-1943) attending Ruskin's lectures then going on to correspond with, write about and collect Kandinsky. He translated Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914), and his importance was acknowledged in the Tate Modern exhibition *Kandinsky: the Path to Modern Art 1908-1922* (2006). He was Master of University College from 1923 to 1934. A similar extreme contrast occurs when one encounters Gordon Onslow Ford (1912-2003) for whom 'fluid spatial envelopes were posited as visual correlates of a universal connectedness of mind.' His grandfather, the sculptor Edward Onslow Ford (1852-1901), would have been astonished and disconcerted. Although he was strange in his way, producing the famous Shelley memorial in University College (1893) and the highly weird memorial for Benjamin Jowett in Balliol College.



Edward Onslow Ford. Memorial to Benjamin Jowett. Balliol College Chapel.

Gordon Onslow Ford connects up to Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, the high priest of viscosity, who attended his lectures in New York.



George Onslow Ford in front of one of his paintings.

Older readers will remember the Action Painting Party in old Drill Hall on St. Cross Road just before it was demolished and replaced by Leslie Martin and Colin St. John Wilson's Law Library in 1961. Which explains why the clothes of so many undergraduates were paint-spattered for years after.

There are many figures in *The Life of Forms in Art* who will not even be names to many readers. The Russian artists Katarzyna Kobro and Wladislaw Strzemiński for instance. Camille Bryen (1907-1977) appears, who 'exhibited in or helped curate virtually every experimental exhibition of the post-war period.' He is in a group portrait by George Patrix of circa 1950.



Georges Patrix: *Les Gloires de 6ième Arrondissement* (circa 1950). Front row (left to right): Raymond Duncan, Camille Bryen. Back row (left to right): Paul Boubal (owner of the Café de Flore), Boris Vian, Jacques Prévert, Armand Louis Fèvre, Jean Genet, Juliette Greco, Jean-Paul Sartre. If you needed a quick tutorial in Existentialism this was the place to go.

You can see a great splurge of his work on Google, but one is reminded of what Kenneth Clark said: 'The trouble with an art of stains and blots, as one can see by going to any international exhibition of tachiste painting, is its monotony.' Incidentally, Raymond Duncan (1874-1966), the togaed figure on the left, wore sandals and ancient Greek costumes all his life and proselytised on behalf of dance. His sister was Isadora Duncan.

One of the isms not covered is Primitivism, which played a key part in the evolution of modern art. Early in the twentieth century there was considerable interest in the lessons that could be learnt from African and other art. It challenged photographic representation, and helped to change the direction. The classic novelistic moment is chapter 6 of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, where Birkin and Ger-

ald confront a startling tribal carving of a woman from West Africa in Halliday's flat: 'it was also rather wonderful, conveying the suggestion of the extremity of physical sensation, beyond the limits of mental consciousness.' Birkin comes back to a haunting memory of the sculpture in chapter 19.

A final thought. Surrealism, Dadaism, Abstract-Expressionism, etc., and all the twentieth century progressive art movements represent a divorce from slavish adherence to photographically represented reality, and a retreat into the autonomy of the mind and its products. It seems to me that they prepared the ground for the baneful state we are in now, where for most people more of their lives is transacted virtually than really. The technology has made what was dimly provisioned in the 'twenties and 'thirties all too achievable. I haven't seen *The Game of Thrones*, but I understand it has dragons. Pshaw!

BERNARD RICHARDS

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present ("on the floor") at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>

Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk).

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

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Meanwhile, an update on the *Magazine's* new scheme for inviting questions from staff members on matters of concern to them for forwarding to Wellington Square for authoritative answers. So far we have forwarded three questions. As yet we have received no answers.

Questions and answers will be published in our new Q&A column as soon as possible; answers will be forwarded to questioners themselves as soon as they are received. We remind readers that their names will only be revealed to Wellington Square or published in the Q&A column with their prior agreement, in order to allow greater freedom for staff to raise controversial or sensitive issues with safety.

Please send us your questions.

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